

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

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### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts***

#### **(SB\_Acts\_A Strategic/Panoramic View)**

#### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In this lesson, I wanted to pause in our study of the book of Acts and review some important material that provides us with a more strategic, panoramic view of the book of Acts. I think that this material is important as it will assist us in our interpretation of the particulars as we progress through the remainder of the study.

#### **The Key to the Book**

By “key,” I mean the dominant aspect or idea that the author is attempting to present. This can vary from author to author and includes such factors as the main theme the author wishes to address. For instance, two authors can write about the same period in Church history; however, one author can be focusing upon the external persecution faced by the church whereas the other author might be focused upon the evolution of the church’s doctrine. There may be some overlap in the material presented by the two authors; however, the emphasis will be different.

The key to the book of Acts seems to be found in Acts 1:8 – “**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**” The geographical development of the entire book is anticipated. Note the similarity to the “Great Commission” recorded in Matthew 28:16-18; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:47-49 cf. Acts 1:8.

- ✓ Chapters 2-7 – the witness is centered in and around Jerusalem
- ✓ Chapters 8-12 – the witness is extended throughout Judea and Samaria
- ✓ Chapters 13 forward – the witness extends to the uttermost part of the earth

#### **Two Main Movements in the Book of Acts**

There are two main parts or divisions to the book of Acts. The first part consists of chapters 1-12 and the second part consists of chapters 13 to the end.

| <b>Item</b>        | <b>Part One</b>                     | <b>Part Two</b>                                  |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Center of Activity | Jerusalem                           | Antioch  |
| Prominent Figure   | Peter                               | Paul   |
| Expansion from     | Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria | Antioch through the Roman empire and Rome itself |

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<sup>1</sup> I leveraged material found in J. Sidlow Baxter, *The Strategic Grasp of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1968, 1991), 261-305 for this lesson. These notes use his material as a basis and I made adjustments where my personal views and interpretation of Scripture differed from his. For instance, Baxter makes several statements that seem to indicate that he adheres to a post-Tribulation Rapture view which I reject in favor of the pre-Tribulation Rapture position. Nevertheless, many of Baxter’s observations of literary patterns and of the strategic flow of the book are valuable. In future lessons, I will be presenting the doctrinal issues surrounding the book of Acts by leveraging material from Charles F. Baker, a protégé of Lewis S. Chafer. Baker’s views and understanding of the doctrinal issues surrounding Acts have heavily influenced my views and understanding in recent years.

|                     |   |   |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Witness             | Palestinian-centric & witness to Jews of the homeland, then Jews and Gentiles alike | Empire-wide and witness to the Jews of the Dispersion then to Jews and Gentiles alike |
| End is rejection    | Rejection of the Gospel by the Jews of the homeland                                 | General rejection of the Gospel by the Jews of the Dispersion                         |
| End is imprisonment | Ends with the imprisonment of Peter   | Ends with the imprisonment of Paul  |

### The Nature of the Witness in the Book of Acts

The primary nature of the gospel preached as recorded in the book of Acts includes an offer of the Kingdom to the nation Israel should she repent. Of course, the eternal salvation of individual souls was at stake, but the emphasis and the primary nature of the witness in the Book of Acts is upon the need for Jews *first* to repent (change their minds) about Jesus and accept Him as the Messiah promised throughout Hebrew Scripture, *then* extend the message to the *Gentiles also*.

In part one (chps. 1-12), the message is to the Jew first at Jerusalem, then after its official rejection there, it is taken to the Gentiles of the land culminating in a Gentile Pentecost of sorts when the Holy Spirit descends upon the assembly in the house of Cornelius. In part two (chps. 13-28), Luke documents the missionary tours of Paul, who, even though he later becomes the “apostle to the Gentiles,” goes to the Jew first in every city only to turn to the Gentiles when the message is refused by his Jewish brethren.

The momentum of the message is carried forward from Jesus’ teaching the apostles “things pertaining to the kingdom of God” during the forty day period between His resurrection and ascension (1:3). It continues to include Peter’s explanation of the Pentecost phenomena to the “men of Judea and all who dwell at Jerusalem” (2:14) using the eschatological passage from Joel (Acts 2:14-40) and Peter’s second message on the Temple grounds after healing a lame man (Acts 3:12-26). Paul offers the Gospel to the Jew first without exception.

Some may object to this analysis on the basis of the fact that the word “church” is very prevalent throughout the book (e.g. 2:47; 5:11; 8:1, 3; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1, etc.) not just the “kingdom.” This is true, but one must understand the basic meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia* which is translated “church.” It simply means “assembly” as has been noted already in our study. Furthermore, there is a definite pattern of the “Jew first” throughout the account – a pattern that is not consistent with our traditional understanding of the “church age” body of Christ where there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. I’ll have more to say about the subject of the “church” as it pertains to this transition period covered by the book of Acts in a future lesson.

### Three Pivotal Events in the Book of Acts

There are three pivot points in the book of Acts: 1) the murder of Stephen; 2) the outbreak against Paul; and 3) the outgoing to the Gentiles.

#### *Pivot Point #1 – The Murder of Stephen (7:57-60)*

Everything in the first part of the book of Acts either leads to or results from the outbreak against Stephen. In each of the chapters of this first section, we see a pattern of miracle, then witness (e.g. 2:1-13 cf. 2:14-39; 3:1-10 cf. 3:11-26; 4:1-31; 5:1-11 cf. 5:12, 16-18). The miracles were supernatural evidences, consistent with Hebrew prophecies such as Joel’s, that the long-promised kingdom was at hand (2:14-39). The message that they served to validate was that if the nation would repent, accept Jesus as their Messiah and King, then He would return (e.g. 3:17-21 cf. 4:9-12; 5:29-32; 7:51-53). In each case where the message is presented in this

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section (preceded by a miracle), there is opposition and rejection by the Jewish leadership. The stoning of Stephen was the first officially incited outbreak against these believers.

The martyrdom of Stephen started the first outward movement of evangelism from Jerusalem (8:1, 4, 5, 25). Through the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution that followed, Jewish believers carried the Gospel throughout Judea and Samaria. All of the remaining chapters in this first part of the book of Acts deals with this subject – the spread of the Gospel throughout Judea and Samaria.

- ✓ Chapter 8 – Samaria – the Ethiopian chancellor
- ✓ Chapter 9 – Damascus – Saul, the future Paul
- ✓ Chapter 10 – Caesarea – Cornelius the centurion
- ✓ Chapter 11 – Antioch – the ministry to the Gentiles

God used the persecution of these believers to accomplish His will expressed in the “Great Commission” (Matt 28:16-18; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:47-49 cf. Acts 1:8). The martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution of believers which followed resulted in the transfer of the hub of evangelistic missionary activity to Antioch. This transfer highlighted the rejection of the offer of the kingdom within the Jewish capital in Jerusalem.

*Pivot Point #2 – The Outbreak Against Paul (22:22)*

Paul is the “apostle to the Gentiles” and was made so by divine appointment. However, in the practical day-to-day events, God used the constraint imposed by the circumstances of Jewish rejection to channel Paul in that direction. Everywhere Paul went, he went to the Jew first and it was only when his own “kinsmen” rejected the message that he turned to the Gentiles. Paul’s missionary journeys and the response of the Jews and Gentiles is seen in the following table.

| The First Missionary Journey of Paul (chps. 13-14)  |                    |  |  |                        |
|---|--------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| Place   | Method & Message   |  | Reaction & Result                            |                        |
| <b>Salamis</b> – the principle city on the East coast of Cyprus (13:5)                                      | To the “Jew first” | General message: The “faith” and the “Kingdom” | Nothing said                                 | Nothing said           |
| <b>Paphos</b> – a city on the western end of Cyprus; the capital and residence of the Roman governor (13:6) |                    |  | Opposed by Jew, Elymas                       | Received by Gentiles   |
| <b>Perga</b> – in Pamphylia (13:13)   |                    |  | A stop en route – John Mark departs          | Nothing said           |
| <b>Antioch</b> in Psidia (13:14)  |                    |  | Some respond, Jews oppose                    | Turn to the Gentiles   |
| <b>Iconium</b> (13:51)  |                    |  | Some respond, Jews oppose                    | Flight to Lystra       |
| <b>Lystra and Derbe</b> (14:6. 20)  |                    |  | Persecution from Jews of Antioch and Iconium | Many Gentile disciples |
| Return (14:21-22)   |                    |  |  |                        |

**Salamis** and **Paphos** were both cities on the island of Cyprus and are the first cities to which Paul journeyed on his first missionary journey. With regard to *Salamis*, we are specifically told that Paul went to the “synagogues” of the Jews. There is a limited record of his preaching in *Paphos*; however, Luke did document Paul’s encounter with Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet. Paul and Barnabas probably began with the island of Cyprus due to the very large Jewish population that was located there. The number of Jews was so great on the island that in A.D. 115-116, the Jews rose up against the native inhabitants and killed 240,000 of them.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that in *Paphos* as well as *Salamis*, Paul and Barnabas went to the Jews first.

It seems that **Perga** is only mentioned because it is the place from which John Mark departed and returned to Jerusalem. The next two places mentioned are **Antioch** in Pisidia and **Iconium** where Paul and Barnabas again go into the synagogue – to the Jew first.

The last two places mentioned are **Lystra** and **Derbe** – cities of Lycaonia. It is doubtful that there were many Jews in these two cities for they were heathen Gentile centers. They were forced to flee to these cities due to the opposition of the Jews in Iconium. The people in Lystra and Derbe initially viewed Paul and Barnabas as gods and tried to worship them (14:11-13); however, Jews from Antioch and Iconium followed them to these cities and persuaded the people to stone Paul so that he was dragged out of the city after presuming him to be dead.

So, the theme of the first missionary journey by Paul and Barnabas was a presentation of the Gospel to the Jew first, rejection and persecution from the Jews, and acceptance by the Gentiles. The message was focused upon Jesus as the Messiah-King and personal savior. As the Jews rejected and even opposed the message, we begin to see a transition taking place FROM the Jew *exclusively* TO the Jew *primarily* and the Gentile *secondarily*.

| The Second Missionary Journey of Paul (chps. 15:36-18:22) |                    |  |  |                                |
|---|--------------------|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Place   | Method & Message   |  | Reaction & Result                      |                                |
| <b>Philippi</b> (16:12-40)                                | To the “Jew first” | (1) The promised Messiah is a Sinbearer                      | Unrecorded, but Lydia is converted     | On to Thessalonica             |
| <b>Thessalonica</b> (17:1-9)                              |                    |  | Some accept, but opposition in general | Flight to Berea                |
| <b>Berea</b> (17:10-14)                                   |                    | (2) Jesus is the Messiah crucified, but risen                | Many accept, but opposition            | Flight to Athens               |
| <b>Athens</b> (17:15-34)                                  |                    |  | No Jewish response                     | Out to the Gentiles            |
| <b>Corinth</b> (18:1-18)                                  |                    | (3) Jesus, as Messiah is offered as King, Messiah and Savior | Bitter opposition                      | To the Gentiles                |
| <b>Ephesus</b> (18:19-21)                                 |                    |  | Not recorded until later               | Return to home base in Antioch |

After a short period of time following the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas discussed a return trip to re-visit the cities to which they had traveled on their first journey. They decided to travel separately and Paul chose Silas to accompany him while Barnabas went his

<sup>2</sup> See [www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch19.htm](http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch19.htm) for a history of Cyprus where the following comment is located – “In 115, the emperor Trajan moved against the Parthians and overran Mesopotamia. Jews in Mesopotamia preferred Parthian rule to Roman rule, and military plans by the Parthian Empire against Rome included sending discontented Jews from Mesopotamia to encourage revolt by Jewish communities within the Roman Empire. And it worked: numerous Jewish communities rose against the Romans. In Cyprus and Cyrene, Jews massacred gentiles in great numbers.” Also, see Baxter, *Strategic Grasp*, 278.

own way. Timothy joined Paul and Silas (16:1-5). The second journey started with an undetailed tour through Phrygia and Galatia (16:6-8) followed by Paul's vision of the "man of Macedonia" (16:9-11). In verse 12, Paul, Silas and Timothy reach **Philippi** where we see the first preaching of the Gospel message on European soil.

**Philippi** was a Roman colony which means that it had a population that had a large element of former military personnel. Roman colonies were organized on a model similar to Rome in regards to government, laws and infrastructure. The Sabbath was observed by whatever Jewish population lived in these cities. At Philippi, Paul and his companions went out by the river side – a place where it was legally permissible for the Jews to worship. Evidently, there was no synagogue in the predominately Gentile Philippi. Nevertheless, Paul went to the Jews and God used the force of circumstances to lead Paul to the Gentiles.

Next, Paul visited **Thessalonica** (17:1-3), the capital city of Macedonia. Evidently, the number of Jews was more prevalent in Thessalonica because there was a synagogue. Paul went to the synagogue for three Sabbaths and preached to the Jews first.

Paul journeyed to **Berea** next (17:10). Scripture explicitly states that Paul went to the synagogue so, once again, we see Paul going to the Jew first. Paul then goes to **Athens** where he makes his great address to the Gentiles on Mars Hill. However, prior to making that address, he reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue as well as in the market daily with those who met with him (17:15-17). Again, we see Paul going to the Jew first in Athens.

Next, Paul journeyed to **Corinth** where we are told that the Jews were very numerous. Here, Paul again goes to the Jew first (18:1-5). In Corinth, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla who gave him lodging while he reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue every Sabbath and he persuaded Jews and "Greeks" (i.e. Gentile proselytes).

Paul's final stop on his second missionary journey was in **Ephesus** in Asia Minor – across the Aegean Sea. He left Aquila and Priscilla there and he again entered the synagogue where he reasoned with the Jews (18:18-21).

On this second missionary journey, we continue to see a definite pattern of presentation of the Gospel to the Jew first, but only in the case of Thessalonica is the message documented – that Jesus was the Christ Who was resurrected. It is also obvious that Paul stressed the offer of the kingdom and the Messianic kingship of Jesus. When the mob rose up against Paul, they were offended that Paul had stated that "there is another King – Jesus" (17:6, 7). Throughout all of the cities visited, "some" of the Jews accept the message, but the majority who accept the message are Gentiles.

| The Third Missionary Journey of Paul (18:23 – 21:3) |                         |                           |   |   |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| Place   | Method & Message        |                           | Reaction & Result                                   |   |
| Ephesus (19:1)                                      | To the Jew first (19:8) | The kingdom of God (19:8) | Largely unbelief on the part of the Jews (19:9, 13) | A turning to the Gentiles (19:9, 18-20) |

Paul travels to Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the believers. After a reference to Apollos and his ministry at Ephesus (18:24-28), Paul is said to arrive at Ephesus (19:1). Ephesus is the only place on the third missionary journey in which Paul's ministry is described with any detail. All of Chapter 19 is devoted to Paul's work in Ephesus where it is said that he went into the synagogue for three months and reasoned and taught things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Some were hardened and spoke evil of the Way so that Paul separated from the Jews and began to reason on a daily basis in the school of Tyrannus for about two years. The result was that all those who dwelt in Asia heard the word (19:8-10). Although many of the Jews opposed Paul, it appears that there was great receptivity among the Gentiles (19:19-20).

After traveling to Greece (20:1-3) and Troas in Asia Minor (20:3-6), Paul must pass by Ephesus on the way back to Judea and Jerusalem. Instead of visiting Ephesus, Paul meets with the elders of Ephesus in Miletus, a town further down the coast line. In his farewell address to these men, Paul testifies that he has taught “the kingdom of God” (20:24-25).

Once he is back in Jerusalem, Paul reports of the tremendous response among the Gentiles (21:19). It is the “Jews which were from Asia” (21:27) who instigate a riot against Paul. Acts 22 marked the climax of Jewish hatred against Paul and his message; the official rejection of the Jews of the dispersion; the event which opened the testimony of Paul before the governing officials of Rome (23:11; 25:11-12; 26:32).

*Pivot Point #3 – The Outgoing to the Gentiles (28:28)*

The final crisis point in the book of Acts is reached in Chapter 28. After a hazardous voyage at sea (27:1-28:15), Paul arrives in Rome (28:16). Paul is placed under a type of house arrest and allowed privileges as a citizen of Rome even though he is fastened by chain to a guard (28:20). He lives in an apartment (28:30). After a few days in Rome, he calls together the Jewish leadership to explain his presence there and to set a date for an interview. When they came, he explained the “kingdom of God” to them (28:23). Even after all of his discouraging experiences, his approach toward the end of his life is still to the “Jew first” and his subject is still the “Kingdom.” Some Jews believe and some reject Paul’s message, but overall, there was general disagreement among the Jews (28:24-27). The apex of this experience is documented for us in verse 28 where a final turn to the Gentiles is documented. Over a period of thirty years, Jesus has been presented as Messiah/Savior/Redeemer in fulfillment of Hebrew prophecies and rejected by Jews throughout Jerusalem and the regions to which they had been scattered.